

THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL

SPEECH

OF

HON. LYNDEN EVANS
OF ILLINOIS

IN CHARGE OF THE BILL IN THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 29, 1913



WASHINGTON

1913

76307—11726



S P E E C H
O F
H O N . L Y N D E N E V A N S .

The House had under consideration Senate joint resolution (S. J. Res. 158) approving the plan, design, and location for a Lincoln memorial.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I suppose it will be admitted by everyone that in case a majority vote was required to determine any architectural design in the world, where there are a number of competing plans, it would be impossible to secure a majority, and that consequently nothing would be done. The history of competitions in architectural memorials prove this to be true. The Washington Monument for half a century after it had been started remained incomplete. Half a century has elapsed since the death of Lincoln, and we have done nothing. There are many suitable forms which a memorial may take, and they appeal differently to many different minds, and there is only one way in which we can ever erect a memorial of any kind, and that is for some men to yield to the taste of others. The present situation shows the truth of the old saying, "de gustibus non disputandum." So one may think a bridge is the fittest monument, another an arch, another a pyramid, another an obelisk. Then there are all sorts and descriptions of statues which may better please the taste of others. We have come to a period in the history of a Lincoln memorial when it is time to act. We have chosen a Fine Arts Commission to advise us, and that commission is unanimous. The Congress of the United States has appointed a commission consisting of the President of the United States, the Speaker of this House, and distinguished Senators and Congressmen, and they have presented a unanimous report. Under these circumstances I for one feel that it is necessary to subordinate my own desire or my own project or my own taste to the taste of what is evidently the majority of those best qualified to pass on such a question. Two years ago, when this question first came before the Library Committee, I was opposed to this design. Two years' careful study of the entire subject, and after having had hearings before the Library Committee upon this subject, makes me perfectly

clear on this proposition: That the majority of the people of the United States who have made a special study of artistic matters are satisfied with the memorial proposed by the Fine Arts Commission. The proposal comes within the amount authorized for the memorial. The cost of the Bacon design is \$1,750,000, which will leave an ample margin for the preparation of the grounds and the planting suitable to the design.

Captious criticism is passed on every artistic design, and it seems to be impossible to avoid it. The greatest works of art have been subject at times to ridicule. I call the attention of the House to what happened in regard to the Washington Monument, and what I shall say of that monument I say on the assumption that there is not a man in this House who does not appreciate the lesson that that monument teaches. As a great judge of art has said:

It is gray in the dawn, brilliant in the sunlight, black in the thunder-storm, pink in the afterglow, mysterious in the moonlight, vanishing in the mist, lost in the clouds—always majestic stands the memorial to the Father of his Country. In the sunlight and shadow, thunderstorm and mist, in the clouds and in the clear sky, against the golden sunrise and the red sunset, against the midday sky of blue and the midnight sky scintillating with stars, against the bright white clouds and the dark gray clouds, moving with the wind, bowing to the warmth of the sun, receiving the lightning's stroke, ever changing, it is always stately, always beautiful.

Yet adverse criticism was common years ago. In the North American Review of March, 1816, in discussing what was necessary for a design for the Monument, an author demanded a statue by capable American artists and derided the imitation of ancient models, and the author says:

If an architectural monument is resolved upon, the principal forms are the pyramid, the obelisk, the triumphal arch, and the columns. The two former were peculiar to the Egyptians and may be considered beyond the power of any modern nation.

In 1879, in an article in the American Architect, we find this sentence in regard to the Washington Monument:

The ugliest monument in the world is in a fair way to be completed.

In the same journal of December 13, 1884, we find these words:

There is some satisfaction in reflecting that the United States possesses the tallest building in the world, but when this is said there will be little else about the Monument of which we can be proud.

W. W. Story, himself a noted sculptor, in protesting against the obelisk, said:

This form of architecture is the refuge of incompetency. In architecture when an architect is incompetent he resorts to the obelisk.

An article in the Atlantic Monthly of April, 1879, referred to the "puerile character of the design" and to "clinging to an obsolete idea."

The debates in the House of Representatives on the final appropriations for the Washington Monument are likewise instructive. On August 2, 1876, a joint commission, as in the present case, was created by Congress, and that commission reported unanimously in favor of completing the obelisk on the site on which it was begun. On April 2, 1878, there was an interesting debate upon the floor of this House as to the location of the Monument. It was said to be in a swamp; that is worse than saying it is down "by the brewery." A gentleman from Michigan wanted the Monument placed upon solid ground at the soldiers' home. The brilliant Cox, of New York, known as Sunset Cox, said:

One thing is very sure, and that is, that if that Monument is ever finished it will be as unsightly as it is to-day; it is not the kind of a monument we should erect in this city in the memory of George Washington.

Mr. Clymer, of Pennsylvania, said:

It is a meaningless shaft. There is nothing in the past like it.

A Congressman from Maryland moved that the Monument be transferred to Baltimore. It would be useless to further quote from that debate. We have heard it all over again this afternoon; the same differences of tastes, the same wildness and crudity of statement, the same inappreciation of the beautiful in art, and the same appeal to the great unwashed.

Now, one word as to the practical value of this Monument. A monument in its very nature has no material value, and ought not to have. It ceases to be a monument when the latter is its predominating characteristic. For that very reason anything that is used every day can never be a memorial in the sense in which our race has raised memorials to its dead in all the past ages. A memorial which speaks of a man should bring to men the lesson of his life at a glance. It should not be something that will enable us to put money in our pockets or to save money.

A memorial is not an economic proposition—it is the payment of a debt of gratitude; it is a recognition of the example of greatness; it is a lesson to the youth of the land. To turn such an object to profit is prostitution, if not sacrilege. But our opponents especially love to dwell on the phrase "Greek temple," and to speak of Lincoln within that temple as a "Greek god," and some of them ask for American architecture as though there were such a thing. If the Greek temple is inappropriate for Lincoln, because it is Greek, then the Capitol in which we stand is inappropriate for us because its dome is Roman. If the argument for the road is good, let us tear down the Capitol building and build an up-to-date Chicago or New York skyscraper of 20 stories. The great styles of buildings were all discovered before America was discovered, and we to-day must and do adopt these styles to our changing needs, and that is the purpose of great architecture. You might just as well object to the use of marble for sculpture because the Greeks used it, and ask why haven't we got some American metal or material out of which sculptures can be made. You might just as well object to pictures being painted in oil or water colors and ask why haven't we got some American material out of which pictures can be made. It is said by some that there is no connection between this magnificent monument and the character of Abraham Lincoln. Such a person must have a very singular concept of art. Of all the forms of architecture in existence the simplest, the plainest, and the most magnificent is the Grecian. All of these qualities should recall Abraham Lincoln. The acme of Greek art is the Parthenon at Athens—the acme of the art of the people who developed the idea of federal power. It was Greek political and statesmenlike genius which welded together the idea of local sovereignty with a State that should be a unit to the rest of the world. The fundamental idea in the American Constitution is unity to the outside world but diversity of local powers among the States. Jefferson pointed out the analogy. Our Government is founded upon a Greek concept of statesmanship. To no other Nation could we look so well for forms that symbolize liberty and majesty and simplicity as to Greek architecture. And what three adjectives so suit Abraham Lincoln—liberty, majesty, and simplicity.

Certainly as grand a sight as the eyes of men can rest upon meets the traveler as he sails up the Aegean and enters the Piraeus and beholds the Acropolis crowned by a Greek temple. For over a thousand years that view has been the admiration of the Nations of the earth. It has done more to teach mankind the lesson of Greek civilization than any other scene in the world; it has done more to keep green the memory of Greek life than Marathon or Leuctra, or any road that the Greeks may have built or than anything else that the Greeks ever did.

And it is now proposed here in Washington that we should erect a memorial to Abraham Lincoln as majestic, as simple, and as breathing the spirit of liberty which shall call the attention of succeeding ages to the second great period in our national existence and form a real and personal memorial of one of our two greatest national heroes.

Finally, there is but one question for us to-day. Shall we erect a monument to Abraham Lincoln or shall we not? It is preposterous to talk of a road in memory of Lincoln, because no road could be in memory of Lincoln. The men who talk about the Appian Way know nothing of Appius Claudius, but these selfsame men, when they behold Trajan's Column, or the arch of Septimus Severus or the arch of Constantine, are forced to remember these Roman emperors personally, and the reason is that these monuments are personal memorials and a road is a convenience. But the project is impracticable for other reasons. It will cost at least \$20,000,000 to build a really distinctive road from Washington to Gettysburg, and such a road would have to be protected for hundreds of feet on both sides to prevent road houses and other places of objectionable amusement from abutting upon it and becoming its principal feature, and finally such a road could be used only by those who could afford automobiles or carriages. If a trolley line was placed upon it so that the plain people could use it, it would be valuable and useful and, perhaps, something that we ought to do, but it would not be a memorial of Abraham Lincoln. It would not be a work of art, it would be a problem of transportation. The Washington Monument cost \$1,250,000; it would cost to-day probably \$2,000,000. The talk of building an adequate monu-

ment in Washington and adding a road to it is simply to add an additional cost to the \$2,000,000 already authorized, and it would in no wise add to the memory or glory of Abraham Lincoln. It might sell more rubber tires; it might be a benefit to the automobile interest; it might help the real estate interests; and I am saying none of these things with invidious meaning; it might do all of these things, but it would not perpetuate the memory of Abraham Lincoln. The question therefore is narrowed to this, Shall we set aside the unanimous finding of the Fine Arts Commission; shall we set aside the unanimous report of the Lincoln Memorial Commission, appointed under resolutions of the Senate and House of Representatives; shall we set aside the unanimous report of your committee and the bill which has passed the Senate? Shall we begin another 50 years of contest between artists over various forms of memorials, or shall we settle the matter by accepting the best authority that we have and in a few years place at the end of the Mall a monument unsurpassed in the art of the world, a monument in majesty and beauty of surrounding surpassing the Deutsches Ecke, where the Moselle flows into the Rhine, the Arc de Triumph in Paris, or the Garibaldi Memorial in Italy, and I believe the most magnificent testimony which the art of the world has ever raised in memory of any great man.

The monument to Lincoln, whatever its form, should be superlative of its kind.

John Hay said—I wish I could give his exact words—to a member of the Arts Commission: “The monument to Lincoln should not be in the rush of life, but a thing apart to which the American people would go for silent contemplation of the great qualities and character to which that monument is raised.”

Gentlemen, we do not want the sensation of the joy rider connected with the thought of Lincoln in the minds of our American youth, but rather the catching of the breath in reverent awe, as when one enters the majestic silence of a great cathedral, where, within beautified silence, one may contemplate the qualities of heart and mind which go to make a great American.

